

JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

BESS BASSETT

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JOLIET JUNIOR COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
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2/20/76
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

How Acquaintance With Joliet Came About -----	5
How the Steel Works Club Began -----	6
Start of Career -----	6
Director of Three Art Circles Chorus -----	7
First Engagement With Remuneration -----	10
Receptionist for Fitzgerald's -----	11
Prices of Furniture -----	13
Husband's Business -- The Toggery -----	14
Tailoring For Women -----	16
World War I and the Men in Service -----	17
The Depression, the Crash of the Thirties -----	19
Two-Paycheck Families -----	20
Industries -----	20
The Awning Business -----	21
Recreation -----	23
Close Shave with Beer-Runners -----	24
The Political Scene -----	26
Meets Clarence Darrow -----	28

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INTERVIEWEE: Mrs. Bess Bassett

INTERVIEWER: Linda Reinhardt

INTERVIEWER: This is an interview with Mrs. Ernest Bassett for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program by Linda Reinhardt at 400 Wilcox Street, Joliet, IL, on February 20, 1976 at 10:25 A. M.

REINHARDT: All right, Mrs. Bassett, what were the circumstances that brought you to Will County or the Joliet region?

BASSETT: Well, in my early youth, my grandmother's sister lived here in Joliet, and we would come over here sometimes at Thanksgiving, and I think the first time that I was ever here in Joliet was probably when I was four or five or six years old -- along through there some time. So Joliet was not new to me, and we used to come over on the old E. J. & E. train that ran between Joliet and Aurora. And that was before they had the streetcars that went back and forth between. So it wasn't new to me to come to Joliet, but the first real meeting that I had with Joliet's other women was a little party that -- my great aunt -- Mrs. Gaskill have for me when I won my medal in 1903 at the Chicago Musical College. And that was a gold medal and I'm showing it now to Mrs. Lind -- right now -- and I was really quite proud of that, as my parents and all of my relatives were. And from that time on I sang at different places here in Joliet. My aunt was connected with the Federated Women of Joliet, and that was before we had a

Womens's Club. And, by the way, speaking of the Women's Club of Joliet, I am the last Charter Member alive since the Joliet Women's Club started.

REINHARDT: My goodness!

BASSETT: So Joliet was not new to me at all because I had sung here at so many different things. And one of the outstanding things that I did here was when Mrs. Murphy, the wife of the Warden of the penitentiary -- and she and my aunt were very, very great friends, and they wanted to earn some money to start a club up on Collins Street. That was called the Steel Works Club, and it was really practically for recreation, and that was how that started. And we put on here in Joliet -- they put on a play to earn some money to do that. And I was the, I had the star part in the little cantata that was given here in Joliet at the old Opera House. And that started the funds to start the old Steel Works Club, up on Collins Street. So I was in and out of Joliet, and then I sang here for one -- I had a position offered to me -- at the Universalist Church to sing, and Mrs. Luella Shipman (Martin Hendele) was the Director. She had a lovely contralto voice. And I enjoyed it; but I sang here for a year, and then my folks wanted me to come back to Aurora and sing because there was an opening over at the what we used to call the big Methodist Church, and they wanted a soloist for their chorus so I left here and went over -- left singing here -- and went over to Aurora, and I was four years singing as soloist in that.

Well, then I was asked to come back here because Mrs. Martin at that time was going to leave, and so I came back and I had charge of the choir which I -- was a quartet -- and I had that quartet for, well, for twenty years. I had charge of that. And we gave concerts all throughout here, and we had a beautiful time together, with our chorus, with our quartet, and with a chorus. We started a chorus within our church and it was called the Three Art Circles Chorus. And we had many places that we sang with that. Now is there something else that you'd like to ask me?

RHEINHARDT: Yes, you mentioned the Opera House here in Joliet -- where was that located?

BASSETT: That was located right where the old Grant Store was across the street from Stillman's. They had a door on Clinton Street. And there was no entrance on Chicago Street, but there was an entrance on Clinton Street. And that was the old Opera House. And a funny thing happened in the Opera House. They used to have some of the campaign meetings for the presidents to be in and so on and so forth, and I remember that we sang at that particular thing and some of us sang from the box, and when we got through, we went back and sat -- with the rest of our people -- and they were talking all about the president, saying hurray for the president and all and it -- when Wilson -- Wilson and Harding -- no, it wasn't Wilson and Harding, but Wilson was running; but he wasn't the one that we were supposed to have the campaign for, and

there was a voice that came from a woman /Laughter/ back in the audience. She said, "Hurray for Wilson!" /Laughter/ That caused quite a little pandemonium.

REINHARDT: Did a lot of the social functions in Joliet take place in this Opera House, or did they have a, like a, central auditorium?

BASSETT: Yes, they would have, no they didn't have only special, only special artists that would come, and plays, the drama, more plays than anything, and matinees on Saturday afternoon. It was really quite a thing to go to. But the only big auditorium downtown in Joliet was the Universalist Church and that was the mecca, really, for all of the real fine musicals and things of that kind because it was a large auditorium and they could open the doors into the Sunday School room and that would hold quite a number of people in there. We used to have some overcrowded audiences in there.

REINHARDT: I see.

BASSETT: It is strange how in one's life we encounter people in the highways that we travel, that we meet; we meet another soul, another person that has had some of the same experiences that we have had, and that reminds me of when I was singing in Aurora, that we had a, one of our men that belonged to our church was a very rich man and a very fine man, culturally. And he was the one that had availed himself to get, for his church, a singer that had been there in concert. And that

meant that singer was Mr. Arthur Middleton; and Mr. Sticks told him that he'd like to have him sing in the church the next day. And he said, "But I'd like to have one proviso about that." He said, "I'd like to have you sing with our soprano soloist and that's Miss Hawking." He said, "And I wish that you would sing with her." He said, "Well, I would be only too glad to." So we sang together; we sang a duet, "The Lord is my Shepherd," and at the close of the service Arthur Middleton told me, he said, "Bessy you should be an opera singer." "Well," I said, "Thank you." I almost was, because Dr. Ziegfield wanted me to go to Europe and study, but I said, "My folks said I was too young to do anything like that," I was too young; I was, too. I should stay in this country and get my education. But it was a thrilling thing when Mrs. David Lentz and I were in Genoa, that on our ship was a woman that I had become acquainted with, and she was a Mrs. Henry and she was an accompanist for a great many of the soloists in Grand Opera, New York. And she mentioned particularly about Arthur Middleton and a ---Mr. Croaks and there was one other, I can't think who the other was, but those three men that she played accompanist for in rehearsals. And when I told her that I had sung a duet with Arthur Middleton, why it just opened up a channel of a beautiful friendship, a beautiful friendship, and I heard from her for a long time after I got home. It was really a highlight of my trip, especially in Genoa.

REINHARDT: I could see where it would be. Mrs. Bassett, can you remember your very first job here in Will County?

BASSETT: Yes. My mother's cousin and her family lived in Plainfield and my cousin, I call her my second cousin, she wanted me to sing in their church in Plainfield; and she said "Now, if you will come and sing," she said, "I know that you will be able to and I want, we want to give you a little money." "Well," I said, "I don't care about that. If I can help them in any way I would be glad to." But that was the first time that I really sang. I think it was the first time in this vicinity that I got -- then I got five dollars for that solo, that scene, that solo, that day. And I tell you that five dollars looked pretty big to me. But it wasn't very long before I was doing more things coming to Joliet. And eventually, eventually, I became identified as a teacher with the Joliet Conservatory of Music. And the Joliet Conservatory of Music had a branch studio in Morris, Illinois, and I taught down there also. And that was, that was really a very fine experience teaching down there.

REINHARDT: Where was that Conservatory located here in Joliet?

BASSETT: It was in the Braun-Kiep Building, and that's where the building was burnt just recently.

REINHARDT: Oh, that's the one where Grant's and Osco's and Printer's Ink is now.

BASSETT: Yes.

REINHARDT: I see.

BASSETT: And in its time it was a very nice building. And it

had on the second landing of it -- before you got up into the Conservatory -- there's a little landing, and that part of that floor was all tile, beautiful tile. It was really a very, very, nice building. And we had reserved a hall up in the building. And at one time a Mr. Spears asked me to have a -- Mr. J. Wallace Spears was practically the owner of the Conservatory, personnel and everything. And we would have a concert and I had a very fine pupil, a girl in Morris that had a lovely voice, Viola Osman was her name, and so Mr. Spears wanted me to have her here on the program. Well, for her to come to what she called "the big city" and sing was quite a thrill to her; and she really did, she had a beautiful voice and sang beautifully.

REINHARDT: You mentioned to me in our pre-interview meeting that you worked at Fitzgerald's Furniture. When did you get that job?

BASSETT: I was there in 1938 when they first started having Social Security numbers, 1938. But I was there a little while before that, before we had our cards, before we had our identification numbers. I was there for, well, for over 35 years. But I've been identified with them. I didn't really stop working there until -- it would be, I think only three years or four years in March. I would do some of the things that I didn't do at the store, I would do at home here. But I was identified with them definitely for over 35 years.

REINHARDT: Were they always located where they are now?

BASSETT: Oh, no! No, they had a store up on Cass Street. It was about the third door east of -- Herkimer, and, it was right in the center and it was on the north side. And that was when there was a drugstore on the corner. And Sprague's Store, which served ice cream and coffee and sandwiches, light, light lunch. And they were the second door. And then the Fitzgerald Furniture Store was clear to the alley to the east.

REINHARDT: What did you do at Fitzgerald's, what was your job there?

BASSETT: Well, I was the receptionist, and then I was called really Public Relations, because I would give lectures to different groups that would come into the store twice a year and explain the reason for the prices on the different furniture and the reasons why the furniture had the price that it did, because it had to be seasoned before it could be put into action. And then my father was a furniture man, too, in Aurora. And I learned a great deal from him, because I like any study, I don't care what it is. And, so I really had a wonderful time learning all the different avenues in the furniture itself, and the decor, and the whole thing was just a wonderful new avenue of thought and study. And I would speak to -- we had twice a year -- and I would speak to at least, oh, a thousand or more people in each season. And that's how I gained so many new friends, met new friends.

REINHARDT: What were the prices of some furniture, say when you first started with Fitzgerald's ? Like how much would you

pay for a couch or a chair as compared to now-a-days?

BASSETT: Well, let's see. Well, a couch -- a couch for \$75 was really quite a high price. Now this couch that I have here took the prize at the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. This is mahogany, and that's all hand-carved top on there.

REINHARDT: I see that.

BASSETT: And this is the third covering that I've had on this. Because I like it.

REINHARDT: It's beautiful!

BASSETT: And it's sturdy, and it's never warped. Now that's another thing that you learn about in furniture. The cost depends on the workmanship before it is developed into the final beauty. And this is all hand-rubbed mahogany.

REINHARDT: How much did you pay for that couch?

BASSETT: I don't remember. I don't remember. . . I just don't remember. Because I would get a rebate on it anyway. But I do not remember what the cost of it was. And -- I don't have very many of my original furniture with me now.

REINHARDT: In our pre-interview meeting you mentioned to me that your husband owned a business here in Joliet. When did he start his business?

BASSETT: He came here first to work with a Mr. Will Crawford, and they had been friends in Pittsburgh. They had been friends

in Pittsburgh because they were identified -- each of them had worked at the steel mill in Pittsburgh, and I don't know how it happened that Mr. Crawford came out here unless he had some relatives or something that brought him here. And he started the little haberdashery, and Mark Harris who was a tailor and -- he at one time was the mayor of Joliet, I think -- he would make the clothes, but he had moved to Chicago; and Mr. Crawford had him -- they would take orders here, the samples and everything, but the tailoring was done by Mr. Harris in Chicago. And my husband -- I met him in 1909. Now how long he had been here, I don't know; I think not too long. But I met him first in 1909. And he had a friend that lived next-door to my great aunt and her husband Mr. and Mrs. Gaskill and that was Ray Fuller, and Ray was rather musical and my husband was musical, and Ray said to him one day, he said, "You'll want to meet Bess Hawking;" he said, "she could help you in singing." And that's what started it, because of the -- of Ray living next-door to my uncle and aunt and telling Ern about my -- telling my husband about my teaching. So he came and was a pupil of mine. That was how we got acquainted.

REINHARDT: What was the name of his business?

BASSETT: It was called The Toggery.

REINHARDT: What exactly did they sell?

BASSETT: They sold, well the first thing was suits, men's suits and overcoats; and they would take their measurements

and then they sewed the neckties and handkerchiefs and underwear and shirts. They also had a company in Chicago that had the custom-made shirts for men, too, People that had long arms or short arms or so on and so forth. And that was a very good business.

REINHARDT: What were some of the styles, do you remember what the men used to wear?

BASSETT: Yes, they were a -- single-breasted had just really come in about that time. There was always double-breasted, usually. But so many of the coats as I remember -- the overcoats -- in order to still have the old, conventional, like a double-breasted -- but they would have a row of buttons there but there wouldn't be two rows of buttonholes. It would just be one buttonhole and then just the buttons on the side, and that was in what are overcoats. But I'm going to show you a picture of a suit that my husband made for me. That was before we were married. But I wanted to exchange; as long as he took lessons from me, I wanted to give him some business, too.

REINHARDT: O.K. What sort of people usually bought in your husband's store?

BASSETT: What sort of what?

REINHARDT: What sort of people? Did everyone, or was it more of a higher-class store?

BASSETT: Well, I would say it was -- its value was of the

higher type, yes. Through my husband's connection in the mill in Pittsburgh he had a fine connection with the different mill people up here, the heads of the different mill people; and when they knew that he and Mr. Crawford were from Pittsburgh, they had a fine clientele from that. And it was very -- it was very good. Of course, they sold the neckties and even underwear made to order, too.

REINHARDT: How much would you pay for a suit?

BASSETT: Well, one of the highest prices I think was about between \$25 and \$30. But that was all but the cloth. The quality of the cloth was, I would say, much better than it is now. Although I think some of these newer grades of fabric, synthetic fabrics, I think that -- but the thing that my husband really was very particular about was the shoulders. He felt that if a man was going to have a suit and have it well-tailored, that the shoulders for the draping was very essential. And that was why he had such good success. Because he was very careful about his measures, he was very sure that he wasn't going to send something out that wasn't just right. He was very, very, very conscientious about that, and he had built up a fine trade.

REINHARDT: Is it true that you sort of invented tailoring for women?

BASSETT: Yes, that's when I, during World War I, my husband's younger brother had come out to live with us, and we weren't

married at that time, but he came out to be here. And they roomed together for quite a while. Then my husband thought that he should be in with a family with some boys or somebody that would give him more of a younger contact; and that was done, and then Ray, Raymond, graduated from the Joliet High School.

REINHARDT: O. K. Was your husband in business during the time of the depression?

BASSETT: Yes.

REINHARDT: How did it effect his business?

BASSETT: Well, it was pretty bad. Now wait just a minute now, I want to be sure. We had the business after we were married; we were married on New Year's Day, 1914, and in 1917 my husband was in government service. He couldn't but he was in government service and Raymond went to France and it was over in 1918 and we had the store -- I don't remember, I can't tell you the year that we sold the store. I just don't remember, but we were in the Woodruff Hotel; the store was in the Woodruff Hotel when the hotel first was built. And Mr. Bassett had this store in there. And I ran the store alone while both of the boys were gone. Oh, that was -- and every soldier that came into our store -- oh, he would be in the hotel staying overnight or something, I made it a rule that no soldier was ever to pay for having his clothes pressed. And that was an unwritten law. And I told the help in the store. I said, "Never charge a

soldier. That's the least that we could do for them." And I tell you we had some wonderful boys in Joliet and they would come down, and I would and one boy particularly (what the heck was his name), he particularly was so pleased to talk with someone in the service, and that boy was a Sharp Shooter. And he was over in the service, and he was hit the first time that he was out in real service; and when he was needed the most and he was doing well and he was shot. And that boy came home and showed me his scars. Oh, I tell you, it was terrible. The irony of fate is that he died of some smaller disease that -- but he didn't have the resistance. He just didn't have the resistance. But we had had -- we would have like parades in the store. He would lead some of the boys in parades in the store, and they'd sing the songs and really it was a wonderful experience for me to get to know so many of these soldier boys.

REINHARDT: What was the feeling of the people here in Joliet in regards to World War I?

BASSETT: Well, I would say that there was a wave of patriotism that I've never seen since. I've never felt the sense of the patriotism. It seemed as if Joliet was really one big family, just one big family, at that one time. I have never seen so much cooperation, instead of competition. Never. And it seemed that there was a spiritual feeling of togetherness that I've never seen it civically since.

REINHARDT: So the boys willingly went out to fight?

BASSETT: Oh, my yes. I should say so. I should say so. I

think that -- well, I know that we had Mr. Joe Spelich of Fitzgerald's, you know, was one of the first ones, and he marched under John Pershing. And that's how I happened to get acquainted with so many of these different groups here in Joliet was because of the lectures that I gave at the store.

REINHARDT: What were these lectures?

BASSETT: Lectures on interior decorating, furniture and fabric.

REINHARDT: How would you say that the depression effected the Joliet region?

BASSETT: Well, I think that it was pretty orderly. Of course, they had these little stamps, you know, for food. And so many of those and you could get . . . And butter was at . . . Oh, that was a high premium. That was really high. The strange thing of it was, my husband and I were driving home from Minneapolis and we went into a place that had -- to eat -- and it came over the -- (they had a radio in it) -- and, of course, radios then were not in vogue as much as they are now, not anywhere near. And we heard on this radio about the banks closing and all this and that, and we were practically wiped out. And all of our savings, the banks failed, it was a -- but as I say, I have never seen -- the town had gotten over the World War I, but this depression -- it just did something to the morale, and I think that that's one reason why that women had gone off to work in World War I, and some of them had kept on, and so many of the women in Joliet were working, and

men didn't have jobs.

REINHARDT: Really!

BASSETT: I would think that there were probably, well, maybe not as many men working, but there were more women that sought work than ever before. And that's how there happened to have so many two paychecks in one house and it still continued.

REINHARDT: So, was unemployment high in the Joliet region? Or just for men?

BASSETT: No, I don't think it was the employment, but I think that the wages were probably lowered. I think that there is -- you see this is a hub of Chicago, and it's the hub of all of the towns around here; Joliet is the hub. I'd say that we stood it pretty well here in Joliet.

REINHARDT: What were the biggest industries at that time here in Joliet?

BASSETT: Well, the steel mills has always been. That had always been the big thing, and, of course, the wallpaper mills, the wallpaper business. In fact, the wallpaper business here in Joliet was the largest in the whole world. There was more wallpaper stuff sent out, and I know that from my friend Florence Chalstrom who was really in her father's mill, and she was a wonderful businesswoman.

REINHARDT: What did your husband do during the depression? Was he working?

BASSETT: Yes. He was a national representative of the Isaac Walton League; and when he was in Florida, he was there on the Isaac Walton League and they had some fine men there. They wanted him to stay, so they offered him a job as the field secretary of the state for the master plumbers, and that was in 19 . . . I think he went there in 1928, the last of 1928; and he accepted the job down there. He had me come down and see how I'd like it. "Well," I said, "if you want to stay here, that's all right with me. Whatever you want to do. I'll go back and take care of things back in Joliet," which I did. And I didn't go down there until -- to stay, until -- later on. But he worked in Florida. Then he came back here to Joliet, and he was identified in several other businesses, and we lived in Gary, Indiana, at that time. And that was just a short time that we lived there. Then we wanted to come back to Joliet, and we lived in Western Springs with my brother and his wife for a little while before we come over here to Joliet, and then my husband started an awning factory in Aurora. He brought out Raymond, came and worked with him in the store in the awnings in Aurora. And I don't know how long he had that. And then he, we, had so many friends in Aurora, too, that I knew, so many families over there, so it's been a kitbag of many experiences.

REINHARDT: You mentioned during the depression the little red food tickets; what did people used to do with those?

BASSETT: Well, they had to get . . . mostly it was for butter,

butter and meat. It was both for that, and, of course, my mother was living with us at the time and I didn't need the butter as much as they did and it was really quite an experience. But that's what makes us grow. It's the challenges. It's the challenges and by trial and error that we grow. And we have to bless those things as well as we bless the beauties that we have, because that brings out character, in my estimation.

REINHARDT: Did people have refrigerators during that time?

BASSETT: Oh, yes, but they were not electrical; they were all ice.

REINHARDT: Iceboxes?

BASSETT: When my husband and I were first married, we had an icebox, and the water would overflow, you know, over the pans that we'd have underneath there because sometimes we'd forget to empty them.

REINHARDT: Well, I had heard stories about people going down and collecting their ration of butter, and they would give them so much, that they wouldn't have facilities to keep it and it would spoil anyway. I just wondered about that.

BASSETT: Well, I don't know about that, but I know that we had in 1914 when we went to housekeeping, we had iceboxes that just had ice, we had no electricity. The iceman would come at regular times, and you'd tell him to fill it up, you know. It

was a route for him just like a milkman has.

REINHARDT: I see. What would you and your husband do for recreation? Here in Joliet? What would you do on the week-ends or the evenings?

BASSETT: Well, we belonged to several different clubs. And then my husband played golf. And that would be fun to go off and just stay at the Country Club. And wait until the men came in and then we'd have dinner at the Country Club afterwards.

REINHARDT: Were there many theaters here in Joliet?

BASSETT: Well, the old Orpheum Theater was a kind of like a vaudeville. And the Joliet Theater, they had some very good shows, some very, very, good shows. And we used to have those usually on a Saturday afternoon. A matinee. Of course, I always liked that very, very much. But I was busy teaching, you see, most of the time, too, and having a choir, and I had my musical outlet. And that was very interesting because I also had a chorus with the V. and P.

REINHARDT: Do you remember anything about prohibition in the Joliet area?

BASSETT: Well, I remember one experience that we had. We had a little club that used to meet together and one couple moved over into LaGrange, and we went over there on a Saturday night. As we were coming home there were six of us in . . . no, eight of us -- there was two cars, and we were driving along and one of the boys that was sitting up in front with

the driver of the car, said, "There's something happening to us." He said, "I think we're being chased or something." And the driver said, "Well, don't worry." He says, "Here's my gun;" he said, "I always carry it." So he told us girls in the back seat not to say anything, just keep on as normal as could be. And the boys thought afterwards that the reason why our car didn't make any move to do anything different was that maybe they thought that this car that we were in was a police car. And so we drove almost all the way into Joliet from Western Springs just at the same pace that these other cars did and we made no move whatsoever to do anything any different, and we were right in between them. There was one ahead of us and one in back of us and we were right in between them and so the boys thought that it must have been beer-runners or else it might have been government men thinking that we were beer-runners.

REINHARDT: What is a beer-runner?

BASSETT: Beer, taking the beer, prohibition.

REINHARDT: That's what they used to call them?

BASSETT: That's what they used to call the beer-runners.

REINHARDT: What were the police department and the fire department like?

BASSETT: They were always very good here in Joliet. Joliet has always had a good police department. But, of course, as the town grew why from 40,000 to 100,000 now, I don't think

we have enough policemen; and, of course, I think our police forces, I think they, as a whole, are just wonderful and I had one incident that happened just a few months ago that tested one of the policemen. I knew what happened and I certainly thought a lot of him for it.

REINHARDT: Why, that's wonderful.

BASSETT: I had an intimate knowledge of what happened, and he really was, he was something.

REINHARDT: What was the downtown like back when your husband had his business? What were some of the other businesses?

BASSETT: Well, just like it is now. Groceries and meat, bakeries and -- but our store was downtown. I think we had a pretty congenial atmosphere. We've never had very much trouble in this town. And when they talk about the blacks and everything, I don't think we've ever had any trouble with the blacks until just recently. With this overflow of trying to give them places in the sun, and, of course, that's right, but I think they have to earn it. I don't think it can be handed to them.

REINHARDT: Right.

BASSETT: And I think the people here in Joliet were workers. This is a working town. This is an industrial, working town and people are used to being -- they've been used to working, and they've been working together.

REINHARDT: What were the banks? What were some of the names of the banks that were here?

BASSETT: Let's see, there was ^{the}old -- well, they used to call it the Chaney Bank, and that's where the Union National is now. That wasn't the regular name of it, but that was the name of the man that was the, I think, the highest contributor in money. And then there was the -- let me see -- there was a bank on Western or on Ottawa Street right beyond the alley. Of course, that first was a restaurant. And the -- First National had the same name, and the Will County Bank -- that went out of business, that was on -- and the Commercial Bank also, and let's see -- the one that had the -- on Chicago Street, Irvin Geist was the President. Joliet Trust, I think was the name of it; I don't really remember. I don't remember the actual names of them. I knew the people in them, but I'd have to think that over to really get the names.

REINHARDT: What was the political scene like in Joliet? Do you remember anything in particular about the mayors or any city officials?

BASSETT: Well, you may be surprised to hear this, but at one time I was approached to be the mayor myself!

REINHARDT: Actually!

BASSETT: Actually, and that was a long time ago. That was after Mr. Jones left, and I was really approached, and I thought it was a joke. I really thought it was a joke! They came up

to Fitzgerald's Store, a committee -- and I knew everyone and I thought that they were joking, and they said no. And I said, "Well, I don't know enough about law," and I said, "I would have too much heart, I think, for the job. And anyhow I don't know enough about law to do that." I said, "I can handle people, but I don't think I can handle," I said, "I've handled a good many people, and the largest crowd that I ever sang before was a crowd of two thousand and that was in Chicago." But -- I would say that this town was very congenial. They had their different groups, and one of the most colorful groups that we ever had were these Serbian girls that had a group -- and they, in World War I -- really marched, and they were really wonderful. I knew so many of them. We've had some colorful, some very colorful -- and people -- the line has not been -- it's been cooperative instead of competitive. And I like that combination, too.

REINHARDT: What can you remember about the early newspapers that they had in Joliet?

BASSETT: Well, we had the Joliet Daily News and the Joliet Herald and those two papers, and then The Spectator came out along, later than that, just a weekly paper. But the Daily News and the Joliet Herald were two separate papers. And eventually the Herald bought out the News. So it was turned into the Joliet -- but it's always been called the Joliet Herald-News, because they bought out this paper. And the strange thing of it was that Adelle Faye Williams, who was a painter

as well as a reporter on the Joliet Herald, her sister was on the Daily News. And I tell you the way that they would vie with news for each one of their papers was really funny when you knew the inside of it. It was really funny. Adelle Faye Williams was a -- she was a fine reporter, and she was a fine painter, also. And I must tell you an interesting thing that happened in World War I when my husband was away and Ray was gone. I was invited to this St. Mary's Church to a wedding to one of the girls in the Woodruff Hotel, and at that time, because I had taken up women's tailoring, I had a very smart looking suit made for me by this women's tailoring because I had to be a walking advertisement as well as a seller, and I went to this wedding and I had this suit. It was a beige ripcord, and it was trimmed with a little black trim around it. It was really quite striking, but not gaudy and then I wore a black hat with it. Well, I had rented the apartment for a a short time and lived down in the hotel myself because it was easier for me to take care of the store than to get downtown, and I couldn't always depend on the streetcar, and you couldn't get a cab when you wanted sometime. You didn't have as many taxi cabs then, either. And so I went to the wedding, but I hadn't had any breakfast so I went into the dining room and was having my breakfast, and the head waitress came over to me and she said, "There's a man in here who wants to meet you." "Well" I said, "That's funny." "Yea", she said, "he wants to meet you." "Well," I said, "who is it?" She said, "Clarence Darrow, his name is Clarence Darrow; he's a lawyer

from Chicago;" and "Well," I said, "bring him over." I happened to know who he was from -- naturally -- and so he came over and sat down and had a cup of coffee with me, and we got to talking and come to find out he and Adelle Faye Williams had been in Paris at the same time going to the Art School and so he said, "Can you have dinner with me tonight?" and I said, "Yes, I can. Be very glad to." "Well," he said, "I've got business here, and I don't know what time I'll get through, but I will be here at the hotel and I'll let you know." So along about pretty close to five o'clock my telephone bell rang in the store and I answered it, and it was Mr. Darrow. He said, "Mrs. Bassett, I'm sorry I can't come down. I can't have dinner with you tonight. I was called back out on an emergency here in Chicago and I'm calling you from Chicago," and he said, "We'll have to have that later." I've never seen him or heard from him since. It wasn't a short time after that till he left for California and he was out there on that big case for such a long time. But wasn't that an interesting experience!

REINHARDT: Oh, my goodness, yes!

BASSETT: And of course, he got acquainted with our -- some of our different people here, but I thought that was quite nice of him to call me up and explain why he wasn't here.

REINHARDT: It was, indeed.

BASSETT: Yeah. We used to save pennies. And it's quite a

lot of fun to save pennies through the year. And I used to do that and that would buy a turkey or buy something at Christmas time. I think that we were pretty frugal here in Joliet. We were a paying outfit. I don't think we had many bad creditors. I think the people as a rule here in Joliet were very honest and paid their debts. And I have, I don't know, I have found so many in the different strata of society here, and they measure up to a spiritual height. There's so many people that are so kindly disposed toward each other. I think that's one reason we've never had any trouble with this black situation. We've never had very much trouble with, a controversial one.

REINHARDT: Uh-uh, well, I think I'll just stop right here. I've used up my questions unless you have anything else that you'd like to add.

BASSETT: Well, of course, there's so many things that I could add but I -- whatever you wanted to know, if that's all that you wanted to know, well, then that's all right with me.

REINHARDT: All right, thank you very much.

BASSETT: O. K.

INDEX

- Art School, 29
auditorium, 8
aunt, 5, 6
Aurora, 5, 6, 8, 21
awning factory, 21
- bakeries, 25
banks, 19, 26
Bassett, Raymond, 16, 17, 21, 28
beer-runners, 24
Braun-Kiep Building, 10
blacks, 25
brother, 21
butter (rationing), 19, 21
- California, 29
campaign meetings, 7
Cass Street, 12
Chalstrom, Florence, 20
Chaney Bank, 26
charter member, 6
Chicago, 4, 15, 20, 27, 29
Chicago Musical College, 5
Chicago Street, 7, 26
Chicago World's Fair of 1933, 13
choir, 7
chorus, 7
Christmas time, 30
Clinton Street, 7
Collins Street, 6
Commercial Bank, 26
concerts, 7
couch, 13
Crawford, Mr. Will, 13, 14, 16
Croaks, Mr., 9
Country Club, 23
- Darrow, Clarence, lawyer, 28, 29
depression, 17, 19, 20
downtown, 25
drugstore, 12
- E.J. & E. Railroad, 5
Europe, 9
- Federated Women of Joliet, 5
fire department, 24
Fitzgerald's Furniture
Store, 11, 12, 19, 27
- Florida, 21
foodstamps (rationing), 19, 21
Fuller, Ray, 14
furniture, 12
- Gary, Indiana, 21
Gaskill, Mrs., 5, 14
Geist, Irvin, 26
Genoa, 9
gold medal, 5
golf, 23
government service, 17
Grand Opera, N. Y., 9
grandparents, 5
Grant Store, 7, 10
groceries, 25
- haberdashery, 14
Harding, President, 7
Harris, Mark, tailor, 14
Harris, Mayor of Joliet, 14
Hawking, Ms., 9, 14
Hendele, Mrs. Martin, 6, 7
Henry, Mrs., 9
Herkimer Street, 12
husband (Ernest Bassett), 13, 14
16, 17, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 28
- iceboxes, 22
iceman, 22
industries, 20
Isaac Walton League, 21
- Joliet, 5, 6, 8, 10, 18, 19, 20, 21, 24
Joliet Conservatory of Music, 10, 11
Joliet Daily News, 27, 28
Joliet Herald, 27, 28
Joliet region, 5, 19, 20, 23
Joliet Township High School, 17
Joliet Trust (bank), 26
Jones, Mayor of Joliet, 26
- LaGrange, 23
lectures, 12, 19
Lentz, Mrs. David, 9
- marriage, 17
Martin, Mrs., 7
master plumbers, 21

mayor, 26
Methodist Church of Aurora, 6
men's wear, 14, 15
Middleton, Arthur, 9
milkman, 23
Minneapolis, 19
Morris, IL, 10, 11
Murphy, Mrs., (wife of
warden), 6

newspapers, 27

Opera House, 6, 7, 8
Orpheum Theater, 23
Osco's, 10
Osman, Viola, 11
Ottawa Street, 26

parents, 5, 6, 9, 10, 12, 22
Paris, France, 29
patriotism, 18
Pershing, John, 19
Pittsburgh, 13, 14, 16
Plainfield, 10
plays, 8
police department, 24
policemen, 25
Printer's Ink, 10
prohibition, 23, 24
Public Relations, (Fitzgerald's), 12

quartet, 7

radio, 19
refrigerators, 22

St. Mary's Church, 28
Serbian girls, 27
Shipman, Mrs. Luella, 6
social security numbers, 11
soldier(s), 17, 18
song, "The Lord Is My Shepherd,"
19
Spears, Mr. J. Wallace, 11
Spectator, The, 27
Spelich, Mr. Joe, 19
Sprague's Store, 12
steel mills, 14, 61, 20
Steel Works Club, 6
Sticks, Mr., 9

Stillman's Drugstore, 7
streetcar, 28
styles, 15

taxicab, 28
Thanksgiving, 5
theaters, 23
Three Art Circles Chorus, 7
Toggery, The, 14, 15

unemployment, 20
Union National Bank, 26
Universalist Church, 6, 8

vaudeville, 23

wagers lowered, 20
wallpaper mills, 20
Western Avenue, 26
Western Springs, IL, 2124
Will County Bank, 26,
Williams, Adelle Faye, painter
and reporter, 27, 28, 29
Will County, 5
Wilson, President, 7, 8
Women's Club, 5, 6
women's tailoring, 28
Woodruff Hotel, 17, 28
World War I, 18, 19, 27, 28

Ziegfield, Dr., 9

